

# Master Chief's Side Trip

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Summary: HaloSonic SatAM crossover. After their escape from Halo, Master Chief and Cortana land on an out-of-the-way planet inhabited by humanoid animals.

## 1. Default Chapter

\*\*Disclaimer: If I owned Sonic and/or Halo, I'd be richer than J. K. Rowling and you'd be reading this as hardcover and paperback books or playing it as a video game. \*\*

\*\*Back to Earth, Without Jump Drive?\*\*

"Chief, Chief, get up already!" It was the voice of Cortana, the AI Program for the Pillar of Autumn. Although, the small shuttle they were currently riding in was all that was left of the once mighty Halcyon-class cruiser, destroyed when the ring world Halo was blown into billions of tiny space particles. She and the SPARTAN-II soldier, only known as Master Chief, were the only survivors of the entire crew.

"The interior of the small vessel consisted of the pilot and co-pilot seats at the bow facing the forward view and multiple screens that showed several vital statistics of the craft. Behind those was a single chair where any passengers were situated, which was also where Master Chief was sleeping before Cortana disturbed him.

"Alright, I'm up." Master Chief grunted in his gruff, militaristic tone, hardened by countless engagements with the Covenant. He was quite an imposing figure standing more than 7' tall. He had his camouflage green MJOLNIR battle suit which he left on at all times with the exception of his helmet that he had removed to sleep.

"What's the deal?" He asked stirring from his chair, sorely missing the cryosleep chamber back on the Pillar of Autumn.

"You've had enough sleep; it's about time we start looking for a planet with suitable technology to build a jump drive so we can get

back to Earth. You know this shuttle isn't capable of a jump by itself."

"Okay, can you scan wherever we are for any inhabitable planets we can find the right parts?"

"I already did that, Chief."

"Then why did you have to wake me up?"

"Do you really want to be woken up by an atmospheric reentry?"

"Guess not, so where's this planet you've found?"

"We're currently orbiting the planet. Of course, I can't guarantee that it will have the appropriate resources for a working jump drive, but it's the best chance we've got. It has a massive city that seems to have the most advanced technology I could find on this world, however, it's putting out large amounts of pollution interfering with the radar. We should land far enough away so that it's not affecting any of our systems; we have enough to worry about already."

"Fine, what can you tell me about the planet so far?" Master Chief asked as he moved to the pilot's seat and proceeded to type in the required codes for reentry.

"Not much, apart from the city, it seems very much like a primitive Earth with large oceans and varying climates from arctic poles to sandy deserts. The only other thing that's different from our world is the fact that there are only two major continents."

"Did you make any maps of the areas you scanned?"

"Some of where we're orbiting above now."

"Have you scanned for any life signs on the surface?"

"I've only detected small numbers of life forms scattered across the landscape. Most of the population may be located in the city, but why would anyone want to live in such a mess?" While she was pondering this, Master Chief brought up the maps Cortana loaded onto the ship's database.

"Who knows? Hold on tight, we're going in." He warned as the shuttle's nose pointed down and began to enter the planet's atmosphere.

"Where are you headed, Chief?" Cortana inquired.

"The closest desert to the city." Master Chief replied.

It was a rocky ride through the atmosphere for Master Chief, but he managed to keep the ship together as he navigated it to the bottom of a valley that would conceal the ship from sight. Cortana transferred herself back into his suit in case he needed help in any necessary data retrieval while out.

"What's the status on weapons?" asked Master Chief as he placed his helmet on his head. "I didn't have a chance to check the

inventory."

"We've got two assault rifles, three pistols, one sniper, a rocket launcher, and three frag grenades."

"What about ammunition?"

"There's plenty for the assault rifles, decent for the pistols, only a few rounds for the sniper, and just two missiles for the rocket launcher."

"Good enough, I'll take an assault rifle and a pistol." He confirmed taking them out of the compartment above and loading them to capacity.

"Why are you taking weapons if there aren't many possible enemies in the area?"

"That's the point, they're 'possible' enemies and I'm not going to risk being unarmed if they prove hostile."

"Fine, be that way; just don't go shooting before you think."

"Don't worry, I'll be good." Master Chief assured her in a mocking tone.

As Master Chief stepped out of the shuttle, a quick scan by Cortana revealed a climbable area of rock where they could reach the top. The sun had sunk completely when they emerged over the edge of the valley.

"Now which way do we go, Cortana?"

"Just straight ahead Chief and we should make it to the city in little more than a few days as long as you're up for a hike."

"I'll be fine."

"Then what are we waiting for? Let's get the lead out!"

## 2. The Encounter

\*\*Disclaimer: See last chapter, thank you.\*\*

\*\*The Encounter\*\*

Master Chief and Cortana had finally reached the edge of the forest, the final leg of their journey to the city where they hoped they would find parts to build a jump drive. This was the third day they were on this world and Master Chief wasn't that impressed, he had seen no signs of life at all. Of course, that might mostly have been because they just traveled across a barren desert.

The last of the rations he brought with him from the shuttle would last for about five more days. They consisted of easily ingestible vitamin pills containing all the nutrients he needed. Even though he was a genetically altered super soldier, he still needed nourishment.

"What do you think, around or through?" The Earth's best asked his fellow survivor.

"Time's of the essence, we need to get back to Earth ASAP so we should go through." Cortana reasoned.

"Alright, do the scanners work?" Chief asked, not wanting to be taken by surprise by anything.

"They'll probably work until we exit the forest and reach the outskirts of the city, but they'll be limited to about half their normal range before then." Cortana responded.

"That'll have to do." Chief said back. "Did you detect any life forms in this area when you scanned the planet?"

"Yes, I found a small group, but I couldn't get a fix on any positive locations due to its proximity to the city."

"That makes me feel a whole lot better." Chief joked and entered the forest, keeping a close eye on his HUD. He felt sure he could handle anything on this world, but knew it was better to be safe than dead, in case they had weapons that could penetrate his suit's shields.

The Great Forest was a bit muggy after recent rains, but Master Chief didn't notice this since his MJOLNIR suit had its own self-contained environment. Even though he made sure to watch his scanners constantly, no signatures were picked up.

"Hey Cortana, how much further is it until we're out of here, it's beginning to get boring looking at trees all the time." Master Chief complained after about ten minutes since the silence was starting to get to him. He was used to the battle cries of fellow Marines, dying Covenant, and Grunts screaming their heads off before he shot their brains out.

"We're almost halfway through now, in another ten minutes or so we should have a visual of the city." Cortana answered, knowing 'big, tough' guys like him needed action every five minutes or so at least.

Another couple of minutes passed and Chief was about to make another comment when he noticed an unidentified green blip suddenly appear on the scanner just to his right and a little farther forward.

"Cortana, are you seeing this?" Chief questioned and removed his pistol from its holster.

"Chief, you shouldn't jump the gun like that; they might take it as an act of hostility and attack." Cortana warned him.

"What if whatever it is would attack us anyhow?" Chief countered.

"Fine, but you'd better not shoot before you speak."

"I'll only fire in self-defense, alright?" Chief was not going to be caught in the middle of a firefight with his weapons stored.

With that, Master Chief slowly made his way to where the signature was located, ready to fire, only in defense, if the situation called for it. He came to the very spot he saw on his scanners but didn't see hide, hair, scale, or whatever of anything.

"Do you think it's an ambush?" Chief inquired, tensing in preparation for an all out assault. Then he noticed a group of bushes shaking as if the wind was blowing them, but the surrounding shrubbery didn't move so much as an inch.

Chief crept up on the bush, hoping that whatever was in it wouldn't see him. It was obviously nervous, either at his approach or something else. When he reached arms length from it, he dove his free hand into it and grabbed a hold of whatever hoped to hide from him and lifted it out of its hiding place.

What he pulled out actually surprised him and that was a feat within itself for he couldn't be surprised that easily. The thing reminded him of a fox from back home, except that it was wearing white gloves and shoes of the same color with a red stripe. However, what really caught his attention was the fact that the fox had two tails instead of one which was what he had caught it by.

It had curled into a tight ball of brown fur, leaving its tails as the only clearly distinguishable feature apart from its color, as soon as it was yanked from the bush and saw who had done the yanking.

"Uh, Cortana, do you have any idea what this thing is?"

"I don't know, but I think you just scared it into a near coma. Put it down before you traumatize it," Cortana ordered him, "and gently please."

"Okay." Master Chief complied and placed the odd creature on the ground as easily as he could. When Master Chief released its tails, they joined their owner in the tight ball of fur which remained unmoving except for the trembling.

Master Chief got ready to leave when Cortana interrupted his progress. "What do you think you're doing?"

"I'm going to the city, we still need to find parts for the jump drive, remember?"

"You can't just leave it there." Cortana scolded.

"What do you expect me to do, make sure it's alright?"

"That'd be a nice start."

"Fine." So Master Chief bent down to its side, replaced his pistol into its holster, and said in the friendliest voice he could muster, "Are you okay? I know you might not be able to understand me, but I'm Master Chief and I really didn't mean to scare you like that. If you can at least hear me, it would be nice if you acknowledged me." He was sure this was an exercise in futility; this creature most likely didn't even know what English was, nonetheless speak it.

"Y-y-you're n-n-not g-going to h-h-hurt m-me?" The young fox asked warily, opening one eye slowly and then the other, but not getting up for fear of provoking his would be assailant accidentally.

Master Chief was slightly taken aback, not for the reason that it responded to him, but that it responded in his language. "You speak English!" Chief nearly shouted which caused the fox to cringe a bit. "Uh, sorry about that, it's just that I didn't really expect you to answer in English." He quickly amended, hoping there weren't any more unexpected surprises in store for him.

"English? I speak Mobian." The two-tailed fox corrected Master Chief.

"Wait a second, if I speak English and you speak Mobian, how come we can understand each other perfectly?" Master Chief queried, now confused at this unexpected turn of events.

"Maybe they're the same language." The young vulpine suggested.

"How could they be? I'm not even from this planet." Master Chief just opened his big mouth. He didn't want anyone to know of where he actually came from; just get some intel on the populace's weapon advancements so he knew where he stood with his own weapons if they proved hostile. After that, he could at least try to find suitable parts to build a working jump drive.

"What?!?! You're an alien?!?!" The now shocked kit gasped.

"Well, here anyhow." Master Chief explained. He noticed the fox relax from his tense position and slowly get to his feet, still eyeing him warily, yet seemed to understand that this strange visitor meant no harm.

The brown fox only reached a height of 2'7'', even shorter than any Grunt Chief had faced before. Apart from his tails, bipedal walk, and clothes, there wasn't any over-the-top difference from any Earth fox Chief could see.

For a while, they just stood staring at each other, not knowing what to say or do at this point until a monotonous voice called from their leftâ€¦

"HALT FREEDOM FIGHTERS! YOU ARE UNDER ARREST BY THE ORDER OF ROBOTNIK!" Two SWATBOTS crushed some small bushes on their way to the two organic life forms their scanners picked up.

Master Chief mentally slapped himself. How could he be so stupid as to let this situation distract him from keeping an eye out for other signatures? The two robots were blue and humanoid in appearance. Their heads seemed to merely be flat cones with a single red visor stretched across the cranial unit.

Master Chief couldn't reach for his pistol or assault rifle now lest he wanted to test out his shields against unknown weapons pointed right at him and the vulpine by his side.

"Chief, you have to make sure the kid's safe!" Cortana hissed over his communicator.

"How am I supposed to do that?" Master Chief asked a bit too loudly, causing the SWATBOTS to automatically open fire on them. Upon seeing a blast about to hit a stunned fox, he did the only thing that came to mind; jumped into the line of fire. There was no way he'd let a civilian get hurt in the middle of a gunfight because of his mistake.

To Chief's surprise, his shields held incredibly well, only taking minimal damage from the incoming fire. In a flash, he grabbed the assault rifle and blasted several rounds into the aggressive 'bots. Some of the shots reflected off their titanium plating, but a few hit them in their optic visors which effectively disabled and sent them sprawling face forward.

Cautiously approaching them, in case they had back-up systems, Master Chief inspected the nonfunctional robots. "Do you think they have any parts that we could use, Cortana?"

"Can't we handle this later, there's still the matter of the alien fox to deal with, remember? You haven't even gotten his name yet." Cortana reminded him.

"Oh yeah." Master Chief responded and looked over to where the fox had remained throughout the little excursion Chief just went through. "You alright, they didn't hurt you or anything, did they?" Chief asked in what he hoped was a concerned voice.

"I'm fine, but how did you survive those blasts?" The now astonished fox questioned in an awed voice now looking at him as if he fell out of a tree or something.

"My suit has shields built into it which took the attacks and neutralized them. By the way, I never got your name, kid." Chief answered.

"My name's Tails."

"Okay Tails, can you tell me what these things are that attacked us?" Master Chief asked, gesturing to the fallen SWATBOTS.

"They're SWATBOTS, robots used by Robotnik and Snively." Tails told Chief, not nearly as nervous as when he was first yanked out of the bush. "We'd better leave before more show up."

"That's a good idea, but first I want to see something." Master Chief said now turning the downed SWATBOTS. He noticed that there were small access panels in their backs and forced one of them open to see inside.

The view that met him was one of several dead lights, switches, wires, and a host of other mechanisms unfamiliar to Chief. "So Cortana, what do you make of this?" Master Chief asked her, not being much of an engineer.

"Who are you talking to?" Tails wondered, thinking this alien was having hallucinations of some kind.

"Cortana, an AI program situated into my suit's mainframe." Master Chief explained. "Anyhow, do you think you can hack into these systems, Cortana?"

"Do you really have to ask that? I hacked into the Covenant Battle Net without a hitch; I think I can handle this." The construct replied in a mock hurt voice.

"Alright, could any of these parts be used for a jump drive?"

"Just give me a second. Nope, there's nothing useful we could use from these things. I can't even find a frequency for any communications; you absolutely totaled the array when you blasted them. It's best if we continue on, if they called for reinforcements there might be more than we could handle at this time." Cortana advised.

"Alright then, hey Tails, is there anyplace around here we can go and not run into anymore of these things?" Master Chief asked his new acquaintance.

"Yeah, Knothole's not too far from here. It'd only take a few minutes to get there." Tails replied, eager to introduce his new friend to everyone.

"Then lead the way." Chief urged, wanting to meet the other inhabitants to see more examples of this world's weaponry. If it was anything like what those SWATBOTS had, he wouldn't have to worry about that little problem.

Along the way, Master Chief decided to find out more about this place before he met Tails's friends. "So, who else lives with you in this Knothole."

"Well, there's Sonic, Antoine, Rotor, Aunt Bunnie, and Aunt Sally as well as a whole bunch of others." Tails told Chief.

The remainder of the trip passed without another word. Chief was too busy assessing his current situation from the time of his landing and Tails was too preoccupied with how he was going to explain all this to Sally.

"We're almost there," Tails finally said, "it's just around this group of trees.

"Wait a second, Chief." Cortana ordered.

"What is it, Cortana?" Chief wondered, stopping in his tracks.

"Is there a problem?" Tails asked, curious as to why Chief suddenly halted.

"Cortana said we should stop, but I have no idea why." Chief replied.

"Hold up, I want to speak directly to Tails." Cortana explained and her holographic form, originating from Chief's helmet, hovered in the air between the two.

The brown vulpine could only stare in wonderment at the form of Cortana. He never knew an AI was able to create an actual body. Data streams were seen flowing over her form and she glowed with a bright purple flair with short cut hair. She stood looking from a confident,

but friendly stance at Tails which calmed him a bit.

"Hi, I'm Cortana." She said with a wave in a friendly voice.

"Uhmâ€|hello." Tails said back, a little uncertainly.

"Don't be nervous, I won't hurt you." Cortana chuckled slightly, reassuring the young kit.

"Well Cortana, what's so important that you had to stop us now." Chief asked trying not to sound too pushy.

"It's like this; how would you react if an alien appeared right in the middle of your town and you didn't know who or what it was?" Cortana queried.

"Well, I guess it might not be that good." Tails agreed.

"So what do you suggest we do, Cortana?" Master Chief questioned.

"Simple, Tails goes in, tells everyone about us, and then we avoid any confusion." Cortana reasoned. "How does that sound to you?" She directed her inquiry towards Tails.

"I suppose so; I'll bring Aunt Sally out to meet you first." Tails said and was off to Knothole, leaving the cyber-soldier and AI alone.

"So, what should we do until he gets back?" Master Chief did not want to stand through another five minutes of silence.

"How about weâ€|play twenty questions," Cortana suggested, "unless of course, you want to stand there being bored."

"Do you want to go first?" Chief answered resignedly, leaning against a nearby tree.

-----Meanwhile-----

Tails had crossed the bridge to Knothole and no sooner had he entered the secret village when he heard the stern voice of one of his surrogate aunts.

"And just where have you been?" A brown squirrel's voice asked from behind him. It was Sally Acorn, heir to the throne of Mobotropolis.

"Ohâ€|just out." The nervousness apparent in his voice. He never told anyone he would be leaving Knothole in the first place and hoped that the discovery of Master Chief would have quelled his aunt's vengeance.

"Out where? Outside of Knothole perhaps?" She questioned accusingly.

Tails sighed in resignation, the sooner he had this out of the way, the sooner he could tell his aunt about Master Chief. Turning around, he became interested in the ground and replied, "Yes I left the

village."

"Do you know how worried I was? What if you ran into SWATBOTS? This better not happen again, understand?" Sally scolded.

"Yes ma'am." Tails promised and then looked up and said, "There's something I need to tell you."

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In case anyone's wondering, and I'm sure you are, I just gave Cortana the ability to appear in her holographic form. If you think that would be detrimental to this story, please tell me in your reviews and if more people don't like it than people who do, I can exclude it from future chapters.

### 3. What Exactly is Going on Here

Before I start this new chapter, there are some reviewer replies to be given.

Thanks to **\*\*SpartanCommander\*\*** for voting and informing me about the armor piercing rounds of the Master Chief's weapons. From now on expect the bullets to be more effective.

Thanks to **\*\*keystone \*\***for the FTL drive information. I've never read any of the books, even though I would like to, and I appreciate you informing me about it.

Once again thanks, not only to the reviewers mentioned above, but to everyone else who reviewed. So far this is my most popular story.

Finally, in an unanimous vote of 1 â€“ 0, Cortana will no longer be able to project her holographic form from the Master Chief's helmet. Now â€“ ON WITH THE CHAPTER!

**\*\*What Exactly is Going on Here?\*\***

-----Great Forest: Just Outside of Knothole-----

"Your turn Chief." Cortana and Spartan-117 had completed round one of twenty questions with the AI in the lead by one point. That didn't matter to Earth's last hope though; he had more important matters on his mind than this silly game which wasn't helping any of them get done. Cortana often worried about the armor-clad warrior, he took so many things way too seriously, not including the survival of the human race and the Covenant's defeat among a few select others.

"When is that kid's aunt supposed to be here anyhow?" Chief asked feeling even more bored during the game than before.

"I'm not sure on that one." Cortana replied thoughtfully.

Master Chief would have said something else had his scanners not picked up a new blip that was slowly making its way to their

position.

"It appears that she's here now." Cortana observed. "Remember to mind your manners." She advised the stern veteran.

"Don't worry about me, I'll be fine." Master Chief assured the Smart AI. Mere moments later, the figure of a roughly 3'3'' tall Mobian came into view. Closer inspection revealed brown fur, a blue vest and boots, and an athletic build. To him, she seemed most likely a cross between a ground squirrel and chipmunk.

Chief noticed that she had caught sight of him leaning against the tree and was making her way towards the augmented soldier with great caution studying him carefully with bright blue eyes. When they were just five feet away, the female Mobian came to a halt and Chief straightened up from his position.

For a few tense seconds, the two of them stood there examining each other until Chief finally broke the silence. "I take it you're Sally."

"Yes, and you must be Master Chief?" Sally returned. "I heard you saved Tails earlier." She added while crossing her arms.

"Then I guess you heard right," Chief responded calmly and did likewise, "but enough pleasantries. I'm here for information about that city." The gruff warrior stated bluntly.

"You mean Robotropolis?" Sally questioned.

"Why yes he does." A digital voice equivalent to that of a SWATBOT, yet more feminine, answered from out of nowhere and startled the squirrel. "Sorry, I should have warned you about the external speakers. My name is Cortana, AI assigned to the Pillar of Autumn. I'm sure you heard of me from Tails."

"Oh, yes. He did mention you." Sally replied, regaining her composure.

"Now that the pleasantries are out of the way, can we continue?" Master Chief asked, keeping the annoyance out of his voice.

"Just a couple things before we do." Cortana assured him. "First, I thought Tails said that he would be with you."

"I sent him to check on Antoine who's currently on sentry duty." Sally answered. "What's the second thing you wanted to know?"

"I noticed that Tails referred to you as aunt, but you're both obviously two vastly different species. If you don't mind answering, can you explain this?" Ever since it was confirmed that the squirrel was indeed Sally, Cortana's processors had been going haywire trying to figure out the reason behind their relation. If this mystery couldn't be solved soon, her systems would overload shortly. The artificial life form, not being used to the confused feeling bombarding her, just had to know.

"I'm not his biological aunt if that's what you mean." Sally responded while relaxing and allowing her arms to hang loose at her sides. Master Chief, however, remained the same in his spot, content

to just wait for a part of the conversation that interested him.

"Now that that's cleared up, why don't we play some Q & A?" Cortana suggested with renewed vigor. This statement caused Chief to groan to himself, the last thing he wanted was another game. There would be plenty of time later once they were on board the Longshore fighter and headed back to Earth.

"Sure, what do you want to know?" Sally wondered.

"First off," Cortana started, "who exactly are Robotnik and Snively? Tails told us that they use those SWATBOTS as some type of enforcers, but we know little else of them."

"The story starts ten years ago. We Mobians were at war with the humans of the opposite continent!"

"Wait just a second," Cortana cut her off suddenly, "did you just say humans?"

"Yes, in fact Robotnik and Snively are humans. Robotnik betrayed his own kind for a reason we're still unsure of. With his help we won the war; however, he deceived the entire city, including King Acorn, whom he threw into the Void. That was the time Snively, Robotnik's nephew joined with him." Sally said.

"How could this planet have human life on it? The chance of something like that happening has to be astronomical at best." Cortana exclaimed.

"Settle down, Cortana. That's not why we're here. Our mission objective is getting back to Earth." Master Chief reminded his associate. The soldier stopped caring about the similarities between this planet and Earth a while back and now his only thought was returning home.

"Yes, but before we get any further, do you have any historical documents of this planet, Sally?" Cortana asked; this world just had too many mysteries that were unexplainable to her. Her common sense told her she didn't need to delve too deep at this point, but her curiosity just overwhelmed her.

"Nicole has a historical database you could scan." Sally offered reaching for the AI situated on her boot. "That is, if your systems are compatible."

"I wouldn't worry about that, I was specifically designed to interface with alien technology." Cortana quipped.

"Very well, Nicole, bring up all files concerning Mobius History and place them in chronological order starting with the earliest." Sally requested once she raised the view screen.

"Processing, Sally. All files found." Nicole responded and a list of events appeared on-screen.

"Impressive, you also have AI's on this planet." Cortana noticed.

"Thank you, now would you like to download the files now." Sally inquired.

"Yes, is Nicole capable of wireless transfer?" Cortana wondered.

"Of course." Sally affirmed holding up Nicole to send the data.

"This will only take a moment, done. Now let's see what we have here." Long seconds went by as Cortana perused the files loaded from Nicole and Master Chief was just about to ask what was taking so long when a digital gasp could be heard.

"Cortana, is something wrong?" Chief spoke up.

"Neither of you are going to believe what I just found." Cortana simply stated.

-----Robotropolis Central Control Center-----

"SNIVELY!" The thunderous voice of the ever malevolent Dr. Ivo Robotnik rang throughout his cavernous inner sanctum. Two of his SWATBOTS had been destroyed prematurely on a routine patrol of the Great Forest. Obviously that meddlesome rodent had something to do with it; you didn't have to be a genius to figure it out.

"Yes, Dr. Robotnik, sir." The wheezy voice of the maniacal madman's nephew and lackey replied. He had been placed in charge of locating the missing SWATBOTS, or what remained of them, in case they were too close to Knothole for the Freedom Fighters comfort. This was the first time a patrol had been attacked and they stood at least a decent chance of finally uncovering and claiming/destroying one of their ultimate prizes after the past decade of continuous searching.

Unfortunately for Snively, he possessed news which he knew would merely enrage his heavily obese uncle and the diminutive, balding human feared yet another severe beating from the robotocized hand of Robotnik. However, he knew that the savage beating would come anyhow if he withheld any information. Timidly, he approached the throne of the dictator of Robotropolis situated in the center of the room on a slightly elevated platform.

"Report, have you found Knothole yet?" How Robotnik could make his voice calm and menacing at the same time would haunt Snively to his grave.

Fortunately, Robotnik's back had been to Snively which allowed the already shaken, long nosed human to pluck up enough courage to speak. "No sir, Knothole hasâ€œ not been located." He squeaked the last few words knowing only all-too-well what would happen even if it wasn't his fault. Uncle Julian loved to place the blame of failed missions onto him which often ended in painful bruises and sometimes even a broken bone or two.

"Why hasn't it been?" Robotnik's sinister tone questioned menacingly. "Did the Freedom Fighters not destroy my SWATBOTS?"

Snively took a sharp intake of breath, steeling himself for the inevitable thrashing. "No sir, Iâ€œ don't believe the hedgehog or his

friends had anything to do with it."

"Really, and what makes you think so?" The rotund scientist asked, turning his chair so that he had a clear view of his nephew. Snively cowered in fear under the pinpoint stare of his uncle. Not for the first time, he wished Robotnik's eyes were not such a blood-red color.

"Bring it here." Snively ordered to the entrance, barely able to stay calm. A SWATBOT that had been flanking him obeyed immediately and presented Robotnik with what appeared to be an empty, cylindrical, 7.62 mm. shell. The overweight doctor stroked his red moustache in a contemplating way, the look on his face informed Snively that his uncle's temper was hopefully short-lived, or at least curved for the time being.

"Where did this come from, Snively?" Robotnik interrogated in a low tone of voice after taking and studying the bullet's carcass in his real hand. Somehow the hefty tyrant made his voice just as threatening as if he had screamed his sentence.

"It was r-recovered from o-one of the SWATBOTS. S-several bullets have b been f-found in the remains, sir." Snively whimpered in response, losing the last of what little bravery he had and turned from anxious to absolutely terrified in that short space of time. This tone often preceded what Snively feared the most.

"Tell me," Robotnik growled, "HOW THOSE MOBIANS HAVE HUMAN WEAPONS!" He finished, grabbing a conveniently nearby Snively with his robotocized arm, raising him to his eye level, and shouting in his face causing the frail human to cry out in pain, unable to struggle against his uncle's firm grasp.

Not really caring if Snively could answer his question or not, Robotnik tossed him aside in an unmoving, unconscious heap on the cold metal floor. He had more important things to think about than beating his simpering nephew to another bloody pulp, like the ballistic munition cartridge he held in his hand. He didn't recognize what type of weapon had fired it off; it had been such a long time since he was last among his fellow humans.

"Take this to my private laboratory and find out as much as you can about it, and wake Snively so that he can assist." Robotnik ordered the SWATBOT. He had determined that if he couldn't figure out the answers to his questions, science could without a doubt.

#### 4. History Lesson

I sincerely apologize to all of my readers out there for taking so long to update this fic. Ever since school started, I haven't had much time for writing and I seem to get several writer's blocks. But never fear! I will finish this story.

"(thoughts)"

\*\*History Lesson\*\*

Hours after the discovery of the mystery bullet, Robotnik finished some routine diagnostics of the major systems and industries of

Robotropolis. It had been quite a while since Snively was put in charge of examining the item and so the malignant scientist chose this time to check in on his nephew's progress.

"Snively!" The ruthless dictator bellowed as he opened communications to his personal laboratory.

"Yes, Dr. Robotnik, sir." The needle-nosed human replied, almost completely recovered from his uncle's most recent tirade.

"Report, what have you found about the object, and it had better be good." Robotnik grumbled in his usual impatient tone.

"So far the tests are proving most informative. We should be completed with them within the hour."

"Very good, see to it that you DON'T disappoint me." With that, Robotnik severed the link between them.

-----Robotnik's Personal Laboratory-----

Snively had been working feverishly on the task set before him by his uncle, mostly in fear of a more brutal thrashing. "(That overweight oaf, if it wasn't for me, he would never have gotten so far in his quest for world domination. The Freedom Fighters would have defeated him long ago if I wasn't there to salvage something from our losses.)" He fumed silently.

"(Sure, \_dear\_ Uncle Julian does small items which are more than likely robotizations, but it's me who keeps this blasted city running. I'm as smart, if not smarter, than him; he should be treating me with the respect I so richly deserve. For soon, I will be the one calling the shots around here and he will be answering to Snively the Great!)" This brought a small smile to his overworked features.

In a mere fifteen minutes, the analysis of the bullet was completed, and with forty five minutes to spare, just as he intended. Now he had plenty of time to work on his own personal project without any interruptions.

-----Robotnik's Control Center: Forty-five minutes later-----

"Well, Snively, what are the results of the tests?"

Snively quickly cleared his throat as he set up the computer screen to show the detailed schematics before giving Robotnik his long awaited answer. "The ballistic seems to be comparable to that of an automatic weapon, especially judging from the amount of shells found at the site. However, it seems to be far more advanced than any on the databases." Snively referred to the weapons database stored on their hardware. Robotnik insisted that they keep records of absolutely everything, especially concerning human civilization, because you 'never delete information, no matter how obsolete it seems' as he put it.

"Really, how so?"

"The bullet appears to be made from a similar alloy, but there are some noticeable key variations." As he mentioned this, the model

onscreen highlighted said variations in red while the similar fragments were highlighted in green. "These elements have been isolated and it is confirmed that they are highly unlikely to have been found on Mobius."

"Then how were those Freedom Fighters capable of creating and using such armaments, Snively?" Robotnik questioned, even though he already had his suspicions of an answer.

"It seems that the only possible explanation for an occurrence such as this is that we may finally have been found by Earth." The statement from his lackey caused the ruthless overseer of Robotropolis to growl in frustration.

"I don't know how they did it, but it's too little too late. There's no way I'm leaving this planet, especially now that I practically have it right in the palm of my metallic hand!" Robotnik struck the arm of his command chair with his aforementioned fist. This caused Snively to slightly cringe and shrink back towards the supposed safety of the computer console.

"What do you intend to do, sir?" Snively questioned of his superior, but all that met him was a stern, contemplative silence.

-----Clearing Near Knothole: One Hour Later-----

Cortana had arranged to meet with Sally and the other Freedom Fighters to tell them of what she had pieced together from Nicole's data. Even Master Chief had been kept in the dark as to what she was about to reveal. But she did assure everyone that it would be interesting to say the least.

Sally did have a time explaining all of this to the other Freedom Fighters, but in the end they all agreed to meet this human. They found him waiting stoically in the middle of the given clearing, although inwardly he was nearing the end of his patience with passing the time doing nothing. As they neared his form, he turned his head in their direction. To him, they seemed a motley crew.

"Hello Master Chief." Greeted Sally. "These are the Freedom Fighters; Rotor," she pointed to a purple walrus with a tool belt and red cap; "Antoine," a coyote in what appeared to be an old fashioned uniform; "Bunnie," then there was an orange rabbit in a purple jumpsuit who had, to Chief's amazement, a robotic left arm and legs; "and Sonic," finally, the super-soldier's gaze fell upon a blue hedgehog in white gloves and red shoes wearing a backpack.

Master Chief only nodded slightly in acknowledgement as Cortana then addressed the gathered group. "Now that everyone's here, far-be-it for me to keep you in suspense much longer. That is, if you all can stand some of your own history quickly being told to you for the benefit of those who may be unfamiliar?"

No one protested against it so the AI continued. "To start off, we'll begin in the distant past to when the UNSC, our government, was first testing the Shaw-Fujikawa FTL drives. FTL stands for Faster Than Light. These engines allow our spaceships to travel to worlds that would normally take far longer than a human's natural lifespan to reach.

"Unfortunately, the earlier versions of the FTL drives weren't as efficient as they are today. Some ships actually experienced malfunctions when the drives were activated. However, this didn't deter the UNSC from sending ships to colonize inhabitable planets since the problem seemed minor and easily fixed.

"It's because of that that we come to one of Earth's greatest mysteries. A colonization ship named The Pathfinder made a slipspace jump but it never contacted the UNSC when it reached its destination. The UNSC lacked the funds for an effective search party at the time, with their resources already stretched thin with the constant funds required for their new colonies, and so they had to accept that the FTL drive overheated either en route to its destination or at the destination itself and the ship had been destroyed."

Sonic chose this time to speak up. "I really hate to interrupt this riveting story, but what does it have to do with what we're here for in the first place?" This earned him a disapproving glance from Sally. She didn't have a chance to reprimand the blue blur for Cortana answered his question.

"I'll get to that later. But now Master Chief needs to know some Mobian history. According to the records Sally so graciously divulged, I have discovered that approximately two-hundred years ago Mobians made their first encounter with humans.

"The Mobians back then lived in relatively small groups much like early humans of Earth were thought to have lived. The humans brought with them technology far more advanced than the Mobians and the two quickly became trading partners. In a short amount of time the Mobians had built their own civilization and had formed a government similar to a monarchy.

"The point I'm trying to emphasize is that when the humans made contact, they came under a unified flag. It was fortunate that a picture of this flag survived within Nicole's memory banks. As soon as I saw it, I recognized the design almost immediately. If you would be kind enough to have Nicole bring up a holographic image of the human's flag, please Sally. I believe it's under the file 'First Encounter'."

"Very well. Nicole, display image of human flag from the file 'First Encounter'."

"Processing. Image found." Nicole presented something familiar to all present. But it meant something more to Master Chief.

"Cortana, are you absolutely sure this information is reliable." The hardened soldier questioned, unsure of what he was seeing at the moment.

"What's the matter?" Rotor vocalized their collective inquiry.

"That can be answered rather simply. You see; every class of ship has an insignia which separates it from other classes. The Pathfinder was an exploration ship and that was its insignia." Cortana clarified.

It only took a few seconds for this information to sink into each of the Mobians in turn as the reality suddenly dawned on them. "So y'all are sayin' that the humans we met weren't from Mobius?" Bunnie breathed.

"That's about the size of it. I believe that The Pathfinder's communications grid and other systems must have been damaged when it reached its destination, including the FTL drive. They couldn't return to Earth so it appears that they searched for an inhabitable planet to set up a colony while they made repairs.

"I can only assume that they found this planet and landed on the opposite continent. The early Mobians must have just thought they had always been there since no explorations were made. This could also explain why Master Chief can understand your language, because the humans taught it to your ancestors all those years ago."

"But why wouldn't they call it English?" Chief interjected, remembering how confused Tails was when he mentioned the word English.

"Not entirely sure there, but that's not what we need to be focusing on. This information opens up an effective avenue that we can take to return to Earth."

"What do you mean?" The soldier pondered.

"Come on, Chief. Don't you realize that if we can find The Pathfinder's landing site, then we could repair it ourselves and return to Earth in a fraction of the time that I had originally anticipated."

"And how do you suggest we find the ship? A whole continent isn't exactly compact."

"I might have a solution to that." Rotor ventured. "If Robotnik really is a descendant of The Pathfinder's crew, then he might have its location in his mainframe."

"That is worth a shot, and I'm sure that I can hack into his systems without any problems. It could work. But we would probably need a guide to take us to a suitable area in order to do so." Cortana agreed.

"We'd all be happy to escort you through Robotropolis, but it's not exactly going to be easy. There are SWATBOTS crawling all over the place." Sonic proclaimed.

"That's helpful to know. All we need is an access terminal of some kind and we're good to go."

"It might have to wait for tomorrow. I had a raid planned for then and I'm sure that it will be the perfect cover for you to infiltrate Robotnik's systems." Sally suggested. "Until then, you're more than welcome to spend as much time as is necessary in Knothole."

"Thank you. Your help is much appreciated. It'll do Chief some good to get some rest before doing something like this." Cortana courteously accepted the Freedom Fighters' invitation.

The other Mobians of Knothole didn't seem to readily become accustom to a seven-foot human that could take a plasma blast from a SWATBOT, but they weren't really in a position to complain. For one thing, no one argued with the princess, especially on matters such as this. Second, he did save Tails, so that earned a little respect from the populace, or at least a chance.

A problem that had to be taken care of immediately was how to accommodate the half-ton warrior. In the end, they decided to give him quarters in the medical hut until proper lodgings could be prepared. Since he was so much taller than an average Mobian, they had to string together two beds for Chief. Of course, in his armor, Chief would have easily flattened both of the beds, but he assured them that he wouldn't be in his MJOLNIR battle suit during those times.

With the question of lodgings out of the way, it was now only a matter of Master Chief familiarizing himself with the village. Antoine was put in charge of this task, although some wondered why he was chosen of all the possibilities. He wasn't exactly what some would call a 'first choice' for a responsibility such as this. But again, it really wasn't their decision to make.

Surprisingly, despite overwhelming odds that didn't look favorably upon the situation, the tour went quite smoothly. The first stop, stemming from the medical hut, was predictable; the dining hut. As it would be expected, it was easily the largest building within the village, which it had to be so that all of the occupants could be seated inside comfortably.

After that, there was nothing much interesting since the coyote kept going on about the smallest details that SPARTAN-117 couldn't care less about. Yet he held his tongue in concordance with Cortana's request that he do nothing that could turn their first friendly alien encounter sour, even if it did only involve a bruised ego.

So he said nothing as the uniformed furry droned on in his French accent that was barely understandable more than half of the time. It wasn't until the tail end of the half hour trip that seemed four times as long that he came to something else that was even remotely interesting; the hut where Sally was to brief him and Cortana on the following day's mission.

John just couldn't get over the fact that a 3-foot squirrel was going to give him mission specs on a raiding operation. But from what he had heard from Antoine's long winded speeches, she was apparently a master strategist here. Soon, he would see just how she measured up to UNSC standards. The moment came sooner than expected when the Mobian in question exited the hut and greeted the two of them.

"There you are Master Chief. I was just about to have Sonic find you so I could explain the mission parameters. Come in." So the super-soldier entered the domicile with Antoine close behind, ready to see what was in store for him.

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Once Cortana and Master Chief receive their first briefing, we'll see how well they work with the Freedom Fighters as a team. But that's not the only thing I'm putting into the next chapter. I have two other things planned, and one is something I'm pretty sure most of you will like. Please have patience because I have quite a few things going on that don't involve this story. I sincerely thank those of you who've continued to patiently put up with my procrastination.

## 5. Reinforcements

Three quick notes before I get this chapter underway:

1. First off, I'VE FINALLY READ ALL THREE HALO BOOKS. Now that that's out of the way, maybe this fic will seem more authentic for Halo fans everywhere. I'll try to incorporate what I can from the books, but I probably won't be able to get everything.
2. I greatly appreciate the thoughts and ideas given and I am also extremely grateful for the information given to me about the Halo universe.
3. I was hoping to get some feedback from a few people before posting this, but everyone seems very insistent that the next chapter be posted. I put just as much effort into this chapter as all the rest, so I hope that it's still up to par with what's already here.

Now, without further ado; drum roll "Master Chief's Side Trip": Chapter Five!

### \*\*Reinforcements\*\*

This was a bad situation, but it wasn't nearly as bad as their situation on Halo had been. For one thing, there were no Covenant as well as no Flood. Add that to this place not getting ready to blow like an overheated soufflÃ© and this was actually quite nice. However, as 'nice' as this situation seemed, they still had to deal with the fact that their only ride off this planet was totaled and they faced a joyous romp through the swamp where they had arrived.

Sergeant Avery J. Johnson observed the wreck of what had formerly been the Pelican Beta 921. It wasn't as hard of a crash as expected since the softer than average soil cushioned their plummet somewhat; although the pilot sure wasn't happy that his ship was no longer airworthy and made sure every surviving Marine knew for the first five minutes of their initial landing. The dark-skinned officer fished a fresh cigar from his pocket and lit it.

He had developed an acute distaste for swamps ever since his botched mission to find a Covenant weapons cache with Captain Keyes. At the time it was unknown to them that, instead of an arsenal, they uncovered quite possibly the most dangerous virulent in the known universe. It was only by the merest of chances that he survived, but the rest of his squad, including Keyes, weren't nearly as fortunate.

Johnson shook these thoughts out of his head. What they needed now was a clear thinker and he was the only possible candidate, at least

in his mind. "Alright Marines, get tactical! We're not staying here for long. Get whatever you can carry out of here that even looks useful; including weapons and medical supplies."

His resounding voice even caught the attention of the flustered pilot and the total group of five managed to extract enough serviceable Assault Rifles and Pistols for each of them in addition to required ammunition. They even got an operational Rocket Launcher. In addition to that, there was an appreciative amount of biofoam in storage. The last thing that relieved him was the discovery of emergency rations. Those should sustain them long enough until they could figure out if anything on this rock was fit for human consumption.

"Excellent, now we need to wipe the computer clean of all information." Johnson declared once the supplies were gathered and he had given them the once over.

"Sir, is that really necessary. I mean it's not like the Covenant are going to follow us. Nothing could have survived that explosion." One of the Marines whose nameplate read C. Patterson questioned. Needless to say, this caught the veteran soldier by surprise, if only for an instant. Every Marine would know about the Cole Protocol. It was the single most important lesson anyone could learn when entering the armed forces of the UNSC.

"Wizen up and think soldier." Johnson ordered, advancing until his face was only a foot from Patterson's. "If we got out of that place in time before it bit the big one, chances are some of the Covenant might have done so as well. If they find this crash site and get their filthy claws on whatever information is in those systems, then Earth will be compromised, and I know no one here wants that to happen. So as it stands now, and seeing as I'm the person calling the shots around here, I'm not going to give those Covenant fools a chance." He indicated to himself with his thumb.

It was true, technically speaking; he outranked every soldier there, even though none of them were actually part of his squad. In fact, they risked their lives to pick him up when they discovered that the ring was going to be blown to Kingdom Come after the Truth and Reconciliation's destruction. Once the explosion had passed, the Sergeant found out that they were all that was left of Fire Team Delta.

They were headed to the Truth and Reconciliation to rendezvous with Major Silva when the captured Covenant cruiser inexplicably detonated. With no real destination left for them, they opened their receiver to pick up any stray UNSC broadcasts. This turned out to be a lifesaver for the dropship's occupants for they overheard Cortana's call to Foehammer about the Ring's inevitable destruction and high-tailed it out of there for less turbulent air space with the Sergeant in tow.

"Sir, you do realize that the computer holds our only way back home and we'll be officially cut off from Earth if we go through with your course of action?" Patterson continued unperturbed despite Johnson's close proximity.

The Sergeant could already tell that this Marine could jeopardize their chances of surviving this little excursion and had to do something to put him in his place, if at least for now. "Are you

questioning my orders?" He began in a tone symbolic of the executioner to the executionee, "Because if you are then you obviously don't realize how useless that information will be for us without a working ship compared to how useful it would be to the Covenant with working ships. So if you want to be single-handedly responsible for the human race's extinction, be my guest; otherwise, zip your yap and follow orders!"

This had the desired effect of silencing the rebellious soldier and keeping him in line, but who knew how long that would last. No matter, for now he would obey without question. The first priority of the current situation was to move from an easily seen crash site to a more secure locale.

"If there are no more objections, form up and move out!" Johnson barked sharply causing the Marines present to do so, each with an equal portion of the supplies; even the Sergeant himself. As one, they marched into the damp swamp, unaware of what lay ahead of them on this mysterious world.

-----Robotropolis: Data Transfer Center B-12-----

This was the first time Master Chief had actually been in Robotropolis. He knew that there must have been some major pollution if their scanners were unable to penetrate it, but this was ridiculous. Years of dirt and grime stained buildings that had been there since Robotnik had taken over and it wasn't at all difficult to spot newer structures for they still had only thin layers of soot and other minuscule particles. No wonder this stuff couldn't be penetrated with all of the interference of these pollutants. He had a feeling that if he looked hard enough that he could see the condensation of the tainted atmosphere glide down his shielding.

But now he didn't have the luxury of those thoughts, being just outside of the main entrance of one of Robotnik's minor facilities, waiting for his chance to sneak inside, Master Chief quickly ran back over the plan set forward by Sally. Simply, he was to hold this location until Sonic created a distraction at a nearby SWATBOT factory. According to her, all the SWATBOTS in the area and surrounding sectors would immediately give chase in an attempt to capture him.

To the half-ton veteran of combat, programming such a thing for robots seemed like a foolish thing to do. Sure concentrating his efforts on capturing the most potent threat might be obvious, but to go through these kinds of measures was overcompensation which left him open to most any type of assault made by the other Freedom Fighters, who each had an edge in their own right. Ignoring them almost completely would be a blunder that would cost him a great deal.

The plan was simple enough from that point on; while the Mobians were on their mission against that particular factory, he would infiltrate the Data Transfer Center so Cortana could hack into Robotnik's network. Sally suggested using this building since it had such a high traffic rate for information. Hopefully, Cortana could move more easily through the computer networks unnoticed while she searched for any clues to the location of The Pathfinder.

Cortana had also suggested that she could download other useful files

for the Freedom Fighters. However, this appeared to be something that Sally wished to avoid. The exiled princess explained that she knew that the two newcomers wouldn't always be around and didn't want to become too reliant upon their skills. She also understood that they had to return to Earth to help in their war against the Covenant, which was quickly explained to them along with a quick recap of Halo, the Flood, and Halo's final weapon just after the debriefing.

Hearing this, Cortana wasn't that hurt since her logic circuits did see the reasoning Sally employed. It impressed the Smart AI that, faced with this situation, Sally still wanted to fight this war without outside aid. Also, she was secretly glad that her offer was put down. All of the information she had gleaned from Halo's computer networks had actually diminished her overall performance. But she would never admit that to anyone, least of all herself, as she was proud of her status as the most advanced digital infiltration AI created by the UNSC.

Then, in an instant, alarm klaxons began to blare from every direction, snapping the two companions back to the present reality. Master Chief could just hear one SWATBOT drone, "PRIMARY HEDGEHOG DETECTED. APPREHEND AT ALL COSTS." It was just as Sally had predicted. It was good to know that she learned the first rule of combat; know your enemy. Shortly, there wasn't a SWATBOT left in sight so the armored soldier waited for a lone HOVERUNIT to pass by before he cautiously moved to the main entrance and forced it open ever so slightly. There may have been no guards left on the outside, but that didn't mean there were none left on the inside.

Once within the steel confines of the building Cortana immediately perused the map she had downloaded from Nicole. This was where the Freedom Fighters gained most of their intelligence about Robotnik's plans unnoticed; at least until Sir Charles had been given his free will back some months ago and began acting as a spy from the inside. But fortunately, they kept this location in reserve just in case of an emergency. Of course Cortana doubted that this was what they had in mind.

A short, empty corridor led them into a massive interior that could easily have been a massive docking bay for fighters. Just remove the several layers of the column-like computer situated in the room's center dominating the majority of the view as well as some of the consoles lining the outer edges and they'd be pretty much set up for business. Not wanting to be left out in the open for any extended period of time, Master Chief ducked behind one of the consoles. They would provide decent cover for his movement if he was discovered by any wandering SWATBOTS on the prowl for individuals doing exactly what he set out to accomplish.

"Alright, Chief, I just need access to the lower level, which should provide adequate access to the mainframe." Cortana assured her partner.

"No problem." He responded shortly and checked his sensors for any sign of movement. He was relieved that the Mobians provided them with a way to cut through the polluted smog in Robotropolis so that they would have more of an advantage on this mission. Of course, it did make sense that they would have such technology since this is what they had to contend with on a daily basis.

If there were any hostiles in the area, they weren't showing up on his array. Apart from the low humming their target emanated, nothing could be heard either that might hint at a possible threat. The defenses of this installation must have been stretched thin with all of the SWATBOTS in pursuit of Sonic. Luck like this was too good to be true and he knew it, so Master Chief hooked up his optic probe and discretely maneuvered it over top of the console so that it gave him the best view he could get from their low observational point. Seeing no patrols did nothing to ease the tension, the platforms further up could be hiding stationary units since his scanners only tracked movement.

However, since he didn't have much choice in the matter, he retracted the optic probe and cocked the pistol he had brought with him. As much as he wasn't up for using his sparse ammunition, he just might have to. Master Chief moved quickly to the target and allowed his hand to hover over the pad to let Cortana work her magic.

As far as systems went, this one felt a bit cramped for Cortana's taste. But the information she was observing did move by at a quick clip. There were even live links from active SWATBOTS and HOVERUNITS keeping track of Sonic. As of yet, they were having very little success despite their best efforts. Also, much to her amusement, there were no reports about the other Freedom Fighters.

But she had little time to dwell on these matters, she had to try and hack into the central mainframe. From there, she would be in the best position to locate, open, and copy any information she required. Navigating these systems proved to be easier than she had anticipated; Cortana constantly read unprotected files along the way, yet none of them served the purpose she had come for. Apparently Robotnik was so confident in his physical sentries here that he never bothered to put up countermeasures of any type. However, upon entering what appeared to be higher level systems, a few firewalls stood between her and certain files. It would have been a simple matter to break through these flimsy programs, but she simply did not have the time to do that. She had to dig much deeper into the system. Putting forth more of her processing power, Cortana headed into the inevitable location of the entire city's information; Robotnik's personal computer.

#### -----Robotropolis Central Control Center-----

Meanwhile, the evil dictator himself was not in a good mood at all. First, a ship of unknown origins had landed somewhere in the Dark Swamp and he had every reason to believe that it belonged to Earth. He wasted no time in dispatching three HOVERUNITS to capture any and all humans for interrogation; if what was found in the Great Forest was any indication, then Earth had greatly updated their arsenals since his ancestors arrived here so long ago and he wished to know exactly what he would be up against.

The real icing on the cake though, was that the Freedom Fighters had chosen now to raid his mighty city. It wasn't that his defenses were weakened with the absence of a few troops; it was that he didn't want to be distracted with anything. The thought that it couldn't be helped grated every fiber of his being.

"Snively! Report!" Robotnik growled in an impatient tone.

"Yes, sir. It appears that the SWATBOTS have had no luck in catching the hedgehog. In fact, he hasn't even made any attempts to fight back." The lackey complied; knowing now was most certainly not the time to test his uncle's ever-strenuous patience.

"Hmm, where was the hedgehog first sighted?"

"Near SWATBOT factory B-4, sir."

"Recall half of the SWATBOTS and HOVERUNITS to that factory and send an alert there as well." Robotnik ordered sharply.

"Yes, sir. Right away." Snively drawled in his nasally voice.

-----Robotropolis: SWATBOT factory B-4-----

Bunnie Rabbit and Sally Acorn returned to the designated spot once they had both set their charges in strategic locations within the factory. This was a maneuver they had performed in other factories numerous times and knew that it wouldn't be long until Robotnik got wise to their exploits. They had to act fast if they were going to get away without much trouble.

"Mine are all set, Bunnie." Sally confirmed with her comrade.

"Same here, Sally-girl." Bunnie verified as well.

"Then we'd better hurry. Nicole, activate charges and prepare to detonate."

"Acknowledged. Charges active and ready for detonation."

"Detonate NOW!" A thunderous rumble shook the ground as the SWATBOT factory began to billow heavy clouds of smoke and creaking metal was heard bending against the strain of the explosions.

As the two of them retreated, hidden from sight by shadows and the random junk littering most of Robotropolis, Bunnie asked something that probably should have been taken into account. "So do y'all think Master Chief got what he needed yet?"

"Not sure. Hopefully he did. But if not, we may need to create another distraction." Sally replied shortly, appearing thoughtful. Waiting might not have been a bad idea, but they couldn't risk the charges being discovered.

By now Sonic would have shaken off his pursuers when he heard the explosion and arrived at the rendezvous point. He was usually there before any of them ready to head back to Knothole. This time, though, they would have to wait for Master Chief and Cortana to return from their mission. With any luck, a long wait wouldn't be necessary.

-----Robotropolis: Data Transfer Center B-12-----

It was a good thing that Cortana kept a constant watch on the SWATBOT transmissions concerning the Freedom Fighters. The detonated factory

would provide the perfect cover for her and Master Chief now that she had all the information she needed, plus a bonus. However, it wasn't anything concerning the Freedom Fighters so she had still respected Sally's request of not helping even though she could.

Without missing a beat, Cortana had returned within Master Chief's MJOLNIR armor. "Let's move, in case you haven't noticed, the Freedom Fighters have already detonated the factory. If we hurry, we might not have to worry so much about being spotted on our way out." She said quickly before the super soldier would unknowingly stall their progress with questions that could wait.

"Affirmative, do you have the map to the rendezvous point?" Replied the SPARTAN II.

"Do you even have to ask?" Without another word, apart from the data extracted, it was as if the duo had never been there.

-----Rendezvous Point: Unknown Location-----

True to Sally's prediction, Sonic had already been waiting for at least five minutes, or in any event, he said it was at least five minutes. At this point, the three of them would have juiced back to Knothole but their last member had yet to make his appearance to officially end his first raid on Robotropolis. Master Chief wasn't exactly expected to show up just as soon as any of them, yet they hoped they wouldn't have a long wait. Robotnik was sure to have every available HOVERUNIT out searching for the cause of his factory's destruction.

"Hope MC made it out alright." Sonic said as the blue blur looked out the window of an old household no longer occupied. Its former denizens either roboticized or fled.

"Now, Ah wouldn't worry too much about that, Sugah-Hog." Bunnie replied assuredly. "From what he told us 'bout his exploits, Ah actually doubt he even has anythin' to worry from no SWATBOT. Besides, we made it here early, right Sally?"

"Yeah, Sonic. Even with the maps Cortana downloaded from Nicole, this is still a new area for both of them." Sally pointed out from her spot right next to the window, which served as their entry point since the glass was not present. She made sure to check the visible portions of street every so often to see if Master Chief was on his way.

"Maybe, but I still think he should have been back by now." The undeterred hedgehog continued.

"No, that's just you not wanting to sit in one spot for anymore time than you absolutely have to. But right now you'll just have to tough it out like we are." The brown squirrel assured him. Sonic would have pushed onward in the conversation, if only for the sake of not having to wait in silence, when the sounds of plasma fire zinged in their ears.

This caused the blue blur to change his intended sentence to a question. "You don't thinkâ€?" He started and, upon looking at his cohorts, realized that they had the same thought. It made sense since

that would be the only explanation for the SWATBUTTS to be making such a racket. Without even a moment's hesitation, Sonic had leaped through the window, ready to aid their newfound ally, with Bunnie following close behind. Knowing full well that there wasn't any other real alternative, Sally soon exited as well, ready to join the coming fray.

-----Robotropolis: Modified Route to Rendezvous Point-----

As far as Chief could tell, one of those HOVERUNITS had to have detected him somehow. He didn't know how, but at the moment, that didn't mean squat. Right now he had more SWATBOTS tailing him than a herd of reckless Grunts. These things were tough to dodge; they kept coming out of the woodwork. Even with him plowing along at fifty-five MPH, armor-clad feet beating the street with a rhythmic pounding, for as many as he outran, more appeared ahead of him. The armored veteran hadn't fired any of his rounds yet since he only had two clips each of Assault Rifle and Pistol ammo.

Master Chief hated to run; running almost always meant that his mission had failed in some way. Even though he completed his major objectives which left only regrouping with his unlikely allies and leaving unnoticed, this situation was completely unnecessary and the last thing needed. At least these things weren't as relentless as the Covenant fanatics he fought on an almost daily basis.

The constant threat of HOVERUNITS also did not help this whole mess and he found himself wishing fondly for some kind of heavy weapon like a rocket launcher. But wishful thinking wasn't going to get him out of this situation and so he had to improvise. Of course, it was by a bare stroke of luck that even the HOVERUNITS failed to keep up with his pace. It seemed that many of Robotnik's creations were slow and cumbersome. The SWATBOTS were nowhere near the tactical equivalents of Elites although their titanium chassis' appeared to provide better protection than some of the lesser Elite's body armor, minus the personal shield. Barely feeling winded from his excursion, managing to keep his breathe somewhat even to get as much oxygen to his amplified limbs as possible, Chief really didn't need time to physically recuperate yet, but he did need time to think about his next move ahead of evading his pursuers.

Hanging a sharp right, he surprisingly found no trace of any SWATBOTS which allowed him to take cover down an alleyway before the ones chasing him had any chance of rounding the corner themselves. This gave Master Chief a few precious moments to do what really needed to be done; think over his options. He couldn't go to the rendezvous point and risk the Freedom Fighters being discovered so option A was out. Then there was option B, get out of the city ASAP and hope that Sally and the others wouldn't wait up for him too long.

Knowing that this temporary cover wouldn't hide him for long, Chief needed to make a quick decision. Fortunately, he was already used to such quick thinking, having been leader of Blue Team before his unexpected mission on Halo. "Cortana, we need a way out of here fast." He indicated over his internal communications. As far as he knew, the others had not yet been discovered and it wouldn't do if they were all found out.

"Are you seriously thinking of abandoning Sally and the others just like that?" His comrade questioned suspiciously.

"No. The original plan's been busted and I'm sure they've figured that out by now. The only thing we can do at the moment is to hopefully keep the SWATBOT's attention for as long as possible so they can get out of here without being noticed."

Cortana's only sign of agreement was bringing up a yellow NAV Point. Seeing this, Master Chief continued in the direction he had originally been going before entering the alley. But only a short while later Cortana's voice rang over the internal speakers. "Chief, I'm going to contact Nicole to inform them of the sudden change in itinerary." The Smart AI took the silence of her comrade as an understanding of her decision as he dodged random junk and debris piles seemingly trying to impede his progress.

-----Robotropolis: Main Street-----

Surprisingly, the sounds of combat faded quickly and by the time the group had reached the street, it had become necessary to take cover so as not to be found themselves before they found their companion. Sonic would have blazed on ahead if Sally hadn't kept him from continuing onward. They had to stay together lest this became an impromptu double search mission.

After the briefing, Sally had given Cortana their communications frequency for emergency contact, even though she and Master Chief were to go in under radio silence to prevent their discovery just in case the frequency became hacked and the latest addition to the Freedom Fighters was discovered. Of course, now that Robotnik obviously now knew about Chief, that kind of precaution became obsolete and so the princess prepared to send a signal to Cortana knowing that she would be monitoring the frequency for activity. But she had only gotten as far as unclipping the mini-computer from her boot when Nicole said, "Incoming message from Cortana, Sally." It was a good thing that Nicole's voice volume had been turned down to the minimal audible setting or they would have been found by the SWATBOTS for sure.

"Put her through." Sally automatically replied and waited for Cortana to begin speaking once Nicole had confirmed an established connection.

"Cortana to the Freedom Fighters. Do you copy?"

"This is Sally. I copy you loud and clear."

"Good. The Master Chief and I are on our way out of here. I suggest that you and the others do the same before you're detected yourselves." Cortana informed her.

"I understand. Do you remember the way to Knothole?"

"But of course. We'll see you there. Cortana out, and good luck." Sally heard the static of the cut transmission and returned Nicole to her boot

"You heard her. We need to head out. With any luck, the SWATBOTS may be too distracted with Master Chief to look for us." Sally prompted.

"Cool. Hold on, ladies. It's time to juice and jam!" Sonic exclaimed and was off faster than a shot with Sally and Bunnie in tow. All the while Sonic couldn't help but think how their role and Master Chief's role suddenly got switched at the mission's tail end. It was something to think about as he sped out of the Robptropolis City Limits.

End  
file.